

## **HERSETH SANDLIN'S HEALTHY START ACT STRENGTHENS SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM**

*Legislation Authorizes Purchase of USDA Commodities for School Breakfast Program; Supports Producers while Improving Child Nutrition and School Performance*

**February 11, 2010, Washington, DC** - As Congress takes up reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, Rep. Herseth Sandlin and Rep. JoAnn Emerson of Missouri will be introducing the Healthy Start Act, bipartisan legislation to increase access to and participation in the School Breakfast Program. Currently meals served through the School Lunch Program receive support through the purchase of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) commodities. However, no commodity assistance is provided for the School Breakfast Program. The Healthy Start Act would, for the first time, expand commodity assistance to the School Breakfast Program, improving child nutrition and school performance while supporting agricultural producers in South Dakota and across the country.

"The bipartisan Healthy Start Act increases access to the School Breakfast Program and ensures that the meals offered are healthy, giving all children the opportunity to start their day on a full stomach and ready to learn," said Rep. Herseth Sandlin. "In addition, allowing commodity purchases for the School Breakfast Program also helps our agricultural economy. Farmers across the country play a critical role in providing healthy foods for a variety of nutrition programs, and we must continue to utilize the bounty of our farm and ranches to benefit children in schools across the United States."

Recently, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced priorities for reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. Among the top priorities is increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program, including providing higher reimbursement rates for schools serving breakfast and combining that support with USDA-purchased foods to give more children the option of a healthy breakfast. By authorizing for the first time the purchase of USDA commodities for the School Breakfast Program, the Healthy Start Act helps meet the goals set forth by Secretary Vilsack.

Research shows that children who eat a good breakfast have better nutrition and are more likely to succeed in school, which can lead to fewer behavioral problems, better attendance, and fewer dropout rates. In addition, especially for young children, having a complete, healthy meal in the morning is critical to their brain development. However, despite the importance of breakfast for a good start to the day, only about 2 billion school breakfasts are served annually as opposed to 6 billion school lunches. Commodity assistance is a critical component of the School Lunch Program and if expanded to the School Breakfast Program, would help schools who wish to grow or begin a school breakfast program, as well as provide additional healthy food options for children currently in the program.

Rep. Herseth Sandlin added, "The importance of school breakfasts is especially important in rural states like South Dakota where access to school meals is often a challenge and malnutrition is a very real concern. Many students from across the state face long bus rides every day, often showing up to school with an empty stomach, and therefore less focused as the day begins. It is unacceptable to allow children to go hungry when we have the resources to provide them with a healthy breakfast option when they arrive at school."

###